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SUBJECT: SPECIAL ENVOY KING'S 1/11 MEETING WITH NSA KIM

Classified By: AMB D. Kathleen Stephens. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) National Security Adviser Kim Sung-hwan told Special Envoy King and the Ambassador on January 11 that the ROK remains committed to improving human rights in North Korea. Kim doubted that Pyongyang would heed calls to improve its human rights record, but it was important to remind the regime that the world was watching. The H1N1 outbreak in the North was worse than the regime had reported, particularly outside of Pyongyang where malnutrition is common, Kim said. He added that UNSCR 1874 sanctions were having a useful psychological effect on the regime. Kim complained that the PRC was thwarting ROKG efforts to move DPRK refugees from China to South Korea. Kim Jong-il's widely-publicized comment that the DPRK has not yet fulfilled his father's dying wish for all North Koreans to be able to eat "meat soup and white rice daily" was a call for the masses to work harder rather than an admission of KJI's personal failure, NSA Kim claimed. End summary.

Human Rights Central to ROK's DPRK Policy

¶2. (C) ROK National Security Adviser Kim Sung-hwan on January 11 told Special Envoy for North Korea Human Rights Issues Robert King and the Ambassador that respect for universal human rights was a central focus of Seoul's DPRK policy. Kim said the lack of political dialogue with the North during the first two years of the Lee Myung-bak administration meant the ROK had not yet had an opportunity to raise human rights directly with Pyongyang. When such a dialogue began, however, the ROK was committed to including human rights on the agenda. In fact, the return of ROK POWs and abductees, primarily fishermen and plane crewmembers, was a top priority. Kim related that many South Korean NGOs had asked the ROKG to delay raising the POW/abductee issue until inter-Korean dialogue was well-established, but the MB government intended to pursue the issue in the early stages of re-engagement. Kim was not optimistic that improvements in the North's human rights record would be likely in the near term, but believed it was nonetheless important to remind the Kim Jong-il regime that the entire world was watching.

H1N1 Situation Worse than DPRK Admits

¶3. (C) Kim said the ROK believed the H1N1 outbreak in the DPRK was much worse than the 11 cases the North had reported to the World Health Organization. He suggested that

Pyongyang appeared to be free from epidemic, but expressed concern that the situation in the countryside was likely much worse. The lack of proper nutrition made the populace in rural areas much more susceptible to disease, Kim stressed. He noted that DPRK officials rarely expressed gratitude for ROK aid, but in what may be a measure of the severity of the H1N1 outbreak, they were quick to express appreciation for the ROK Tamiflu shipment sent North in December.

Sanctions Having Psychological Effect

¶4. (C) Kim suggested that UNSCR 1874 sanctions now appeared to be having at least a psychological effect on the DPRK regime. He noted that this was the first time UN sanctions against the North had actually been implemented. He surmised that restrictions on the flow of luxury goods into Pyongyang would pressure elites on which Kim Jong-il depends. NSA Kim also believed the interdiction of weapons shipments in Thailand and the UAE would also have at least an important psychological effect on elites. Kim claimed that even China was sensitive to the issue of sanctions, noting that Premier Wen Jiabao was quick to reassure President Lee during his visit to China in October that PRC aid to the DPRK did not violate 1874.

China Thwarting ROK Refugee Assistance

¶5. (C) Continuing on the China theme, Kim complained that the PRC was thwarting ROK efforts to move DPRK refugees from China to South Korea, indicating there were still significant numbers of refugees being housed in cramped ROK diplomatic facilities throughout China. Many refugees had to live on small diplomatic compounds for one to two years before the Chinese would allow them to move on to the ROK. This PRC-created logjam was now deterring refugees from seeking protection in ROK diplomatic missions. Echoing comments by Foreign Minister Yu (septel), Kim asserted that most refugees now opt to travel to Laos, Burma, and Thailand before entering ROK diplomatic missions. All three countries were now quietly cooperating with Seoul in allowing refugees safe passage to the ROK. China's characterization of refugees as economic migrants and/or criminals was also a serious problem the ROK was working to resolve, Kim said, adding that the ROK routinely asks Beijing not to refoule North Korean refugees detained within China.

Current Developments in DPRK

¶6. (C) Kim said the ROKG was not aware of serious unrest resulting from the North's recent currency revaluation, but the regime's recent arrests of people holding foreign currency was troubling. Kim Jong-il's comment that the DPRK has not yet fulfilled his father's dying wish that all North Koreans be able to eat "meat soup and white rice" was not an admission of failure, but a call for the people to work harder. Kim added that the ROK had intelligence suggesting Kim Jong-il might visit China soon.

STEPHENS